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## Viewing cable 06MANAGUA2615, MONTEALEGRE TO A/S SHANNON: I WILL GIVE ORTEGA THE

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### Understanding cables

Every cable message consists of three parts:

- The top box shows each cables unique reference number, when and by whom it originally was sent, and what its initial classification was.
- The middle box contains the header information that is associated with the cable. It includes information about the receiver(s) as well as a general subject.
- The bottom box presents the body of the cable. The opening can contain a more specific subject, references to other cables ([browse by origin](#) to find them) or additional comment. This is followed by the main contents of the cable: a summary, a collection of specific topics and a comment section.

To understand the justification used for the classification of each cable, please use this [WikiSource](#) article as reference.

### Discussing cables

If you find meaningful or important information in a cable, please link directly to its unique reference number. Linking to a specific paragraph in the body of a cable is also possible by copying the appropriate link (to be found at the paragraph symbol). Please mark messages for social networking services like Twitter with the hash tags **#cablegate** and a hash containing the reference ID e.g. **#06MANAGUA2615**.

Reference ID	Created	Released	Classification	Origin
<a href="#">06MANAGUA2615</a>	<a href="#">2006-12-01 18:14</a>	<a href="#">2011-08-30 01:44</a>	<a href="#">CONFIDENTIAL</a>	<a href="#">Embassy Managua</a>

Appears in these articles:

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<http://www.confidencial.com.ni/articulo/3967/barreto-era-ldquo-fuente-confiable-rdquo-para-eeuu>

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PP RUEHWEB

DE RUEHMU #2615/01 3351814  
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INFO RUEHZA/WHA CENTRAL AMERICAN COLLECTIVE PRIORITY  
RUEHCV/AMEMBASSY CARACAS PRIORITY 0840  
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC PRIORITY  
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY  
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L MANAGUA 002615

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR WHA A/S SHANNON, WHA/CEN

E.O. 12958: DECL: 12/01/2016  
TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PINR](#) [KDEM](#) [NU](#)  
SUBJECT: MONTEALEGRE TO A/S SHANNON: I WILL GIVE ORTEGA THE  
BENEFIT OF THE DOUBT, BUT NO ROOM FOR EXCUSES

Classified By: Ambassador Paul A. Trivelli. Reasons 1.4 (B,D).

¶1. (C) Summary: On November 28, Assistant Secretary Tom Shannon discussed with former Nicaraguan Liberal Alliance (ALN) presidential candidate Eduardo Montealegre the election outcome, the future of bilateral relations, and Montealegre's future role in ensuring Nicaragua remains on a democratic path. Montealegre, who assured Shannon he will "give Ortega the benefit of the doubt, but no room for excuses," noted that Nicaragua has changed, and Ortega's powers are now limited. As the leader of a "constructive opposition," Montealegre will honor his campaign commitments to defend human liberties and help Nicaragua's most needy, and will support the Ortega government so long as it remains within a democratic framework. The Assistant Secretary noted our commitment to working with the new government and our determination not to abandon the Nicaraguan people, its democracy, and civil society -- including helping the ALN and its allies who represent Nicaragua's future. End Summary.

GIVE ORTEGA THE BENEFIT OF THE DOUBT, BUT NO BLANK CHECK  
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¶2. (C) Over breakfast, Assistant Secretary Tom Shannon and former Nicaraguan Liberal Alliance (ALN) presidential candidate Eduardo Montealegre discussed the election outcome, the future of bilateral relations with an Ortega government, and Montealegre's future role in ensuring Nicaragua remains on a democratic path. Montealegre assured A/S Shannon he will "give Ortega the benefit of the doubt, but no excuses," noting that Nicaragua has changed and Sandinista National Liberation Front (FSLN) Daniel Ortega's powers will now be more limited. He explained that a series of checks and balances that have emerged over the past 15 years will restrict Ortega. Montealegre added that as a minority president, Ortega must learn to negotiate with those who did not support him, meet high expectations of those who did, and inform a savvier populace of his plans. Further, Ortega -- who must operate within the framework of international financial institution (IFI) limitations -- realizes his relations with the United States will be determinant in his success or failure.

¶3. (C) The Assistant Secretary noted the U.S. commitment to work with the new government and our determination not to abandon the Nicaraguan people, its democracy, and civil society -- including helping the ALN and its allies who represent Nicaragua's future. A/S Shannon ventured that Ortega will attempt to fragment the ALN and civil society; to counter these efforts, the ALN and civil society must strengthen and build leadership. Montealegre lauded the

USG's constructive posture towards Ortega, opining that neither "cornering Ortega nor giving him a blank check" would be productive at this juncture. Montealegre said he will lead a "constructive opposition" and honor his campaign commitments to defend human liberties and help Nicaragua's most needy, and remarked that he will support Ortega's government efforts so long as it remains within a democratic framework.

#### ALN BROKE THE PACT BUT DID NOT KILL IT

14. (C) For Montealegre, the ALN's participation in the November election broke the Aleman-Ortega pact, or at least "detoured" it, but the cost was Ortega's victory. Nonetheless, the pact is not dead and Aleman will do his utmost to continue it, predicted Montealegre. He suggested that the USG can capitalize on Ortega's desire to maintain positive relations with the United States by driving a wedge between Ortega and Aleman. According to ALN legal advisor Mauricio Montealegre, the election outcome "would have been worse if the PLC had won." Now no party will represent the simple majority in the National Assembly required to pass most legislation (47 votes) and the FSLN can seek support from the ALN to pass legislation and will no longer be forced to rely exclusively on the PLC.

#### BREAKING THE PACT IN THE SUPREME COURT

15. (C) Regarding the appointments of three Supreme Court justices whose terms expire, the ALN legal advisor explained that the FSLN, PLC, and ALN will each put forth one candidate. However, the ALN is considering "sacrificing" its candidate by eliminating the position, which would reduce by one the number of judges (currently 16) and break the tie between the PLC and FSLN. Under this scenario, the FSLN would have 8 CSJ magistrates and the PLC only 7, and the FSLN could no longer use the excuse that it cannot rule on any case -- e.g., PLC caudillo Arnoldo Aleman --- without PLC buy in. Moreover, PLC designated Judge Edgar Navas now sympathizes with the ALN, claimed Mauricio Montealegre.

#### PLC HAS ONE MASTER - ALEMAN

16. (C) To A/S Shannon's comment that he would meet with former PLC presidential and vice presidential candidates Jose Rizo and Jose Antonio Alvarado (septel), Montealegre replied that Rizo may be well intentioned, sharing that he had called Rizo to congratulate him for challenging Aleman's misguided leadership of the PLC. However, Alvarado cannot be trusted, warned Montealegre, adding that Alvarado's wife Gloria was instrumental in convincing Rizo and her husband to stay in the race. As for Aleman, he treats the PLC as his property and the party is no longer democratic.

#### CENIS -- THE ISSUE THAT WON'T QUIT

17. (C) Mauricio Montealegre next raised the debt bonds (CENIs) issue, which the PLC (and the FSLN) held over Eduardo Montealegre's head to lower voter support for the ALN candidate. He warned that the PLC will continue hammering the CENIs case to erode the ALN and remove Eduardo Montealegre from Aleman's path to the presidency in 2011. (Note: Aleman has publicly implied he will run for the presidency in 2011. End Note.) Eduardo Montealegre added that if the CENIs issue resurfaces, a number of FSLN leaders, including International Affairs Secretary Samuel Santos, could be dragged into the quagmire, as he was a member of failed Interbank's board of directors. He said that Santos and other Sandinistas might halt the CENIs case to protect their own hides, noting he had warned Santos and FSLN Assembly Deputy Edwin Castro that if the CENIs issue becomes a crisis, it could trigger an investor stampede and capital flight.

## HELPING THE MOVIMIENTO POR NICARAGUA WILL HELP US

18. (C) Eduardo Montealegre ventured that civil society will be his party's and democracy's best ally, noting that the ALN could be best boosted by our continued support for the Movimiento por Nicaragua (MpN). Specifically, enabling the MpN to open departmental and municipal branches would help the ALN compete in the 2008 municipal elections.

## IN SEARCH OF A FEW SALVAGEABLE PLC DEPUTIES

19. (C) Montealegre shared his party's plans to convince six to seven PLC lawmakers to join the ALN. He asserted that PLC National Assembly Deputy Enrique Quinonez is not one of them, as Quinonez' short-lived call for PLC reform and his overtures to the ALN were probably decoys sent to confuse the ALN. Montealegre suggested that Freddy Torrez, Maximino Rodriguez, Porfirio Castro (all representing Matagalpa department); Rodolfo Jose Alfaro Garcia (Madriz); Gabriel Rivera (Esteli); Luis Ortega Urbina Ortega; and, possibly Francisco Aguirre Sacasa, (national level deputy) are salvageable, although Aguirre's ambitions to become president might cloud his decision-making. Montealegre argued that weakening Aleman is crucial to this effort and the U.S. can play a vital role. However, Montealegre said the U.S. needs to use "actions and not words." He asserted that the verbal attacks have enhanced Aleman and the lack of substantive steps against him has eliminated any fear he might have had of the United States. He said that Aleman has called the U.S. a "paper tiger" that talks tough but does not act.

## WE NEED TO KEEP THE PRESIDENTIAL SYSTEM

10. (C) Montealegre does not support nor trust Daniel Ortega's interest in installing a parliamentary system of government, starting with allowing five constitutional reforms to enter into force on January 20, 2007 -- reforms that would erode executive powers and bolster the power of the legislature. Rather, Nicaragua should improve on its presidential system, opined Montealegre, and he has proposed

that the constitutional reforms be suspended for another year to allow time for further deliberation within the incoming National Assembly and public debate. (Note: The reforms -- a result of the Aleman-Ortega crusade to limit President Bolanos' executive powers and bolster the PLC-FSLN pact -- include the establishment of a new property, public utility, and social security entities, allowing the legislature to partially modify a presidential veto, and requires Assembly approval of presidential cabinet and other senior-level appointments. The National Assembly's approval of a "framework law", or Ley Marco, in fall 2006, postponed to January 20, 2007 the implementation of these laws. End Note.)

## A PUSH FOR JUDICIAL AND ELECTORAL REFORMS

11. (C) In addition to plans to consolidate his party and prepare for the 2008 municipal elections, Montealegre will advocate for profound judicial and electoral reforms. He said he will start his electoral reform initiative based on a 2004 draft that the Conservative Party had supported. Objectives include raising the threshold to win the presidential election back to 45%, or perhaps even higher, requiring all parties to conduct primaries, and the direct election of Assembly candidates. (Note: On the afternoon of November 28, Montealegre announced the ALN's proposal to reform Nicaragua's electoral law, which would include raising the percentage required to elect the president to 51%. End Note.)

## RELATIONS WITH VENEZUELA AND TAIWAN

¶12. (C) Montealegre predicted that Ortega will maintain close ties with Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez. However Chavez' support to his government will be limited by legal parameters requiring direct foreign assistance to pass Assembly approval. Regarding relations with Taiwan, Montealegre predicted that Ortega will continue to recognize the Taiwanese for now, but in exchange for a hefty "fee." Eventually, however, Ortega will recognize Mainland China to Taiwan's detriment.

¶13. (U) Participants:

Nicaragua:

Eduardo Montealegre

Azalea Aviles (president of ALN-allied Conservative Party)

Mauricio Montealegre (ALN legal adviser, former CSE magistrate)

U.S.:

Assistant Secretary Tom Shannon

Ambassador Paul Trivelli

DCM Peter Brennan

Political Counselor/notetaker Victoria Alvarado( notetaker)

¶14. (U) This cable was cleared by A/S Shannon.

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